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ABSTRACT

The story of the Dropout Prevention Initiative (DPI) of the New York City Schools illuminates the obstacles, incentives, and inventions that can come into play in a large city school system's effort to strengthen its effectiveness for at-risk students. The Board of Education commissioned an external evaluation of the DPI in 13 comprehensive high schools and 29 feeder middle schools. Data were collected through observation, interviews with staff, student and staff surveys, reviews of information provided by the Board of Education, and a longitudinal study of student outcomes for three cohorts of students. In each year of the DPI, tens of thousands of services to targeted students were recorded. In addition, specific programs under the umbrella of the DPI were reviewed, and detailed case studies were made of three high schools and one elementary and one middle school. The progress observed in these schools is a solid basis for believing that the school system is improving its response to at-risk students and bringing new resources to the schools. Nevertheless, several problems with the DPI program and the school system were identified, and are the subject of recommendations for program improvement. The serious effort that the Board of Education has made is unparalleled in its recent history. The system is engaged in much-needed reforms. A technical note considers the calculation of the city's dropout rate. (SLD)

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EDUCATIONAL REFORMS FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS
NEW YORK CITY CASE STUDY

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Between the school years of 1984-85 and 1989-90, the New York City Public Schools implemented a set of dropout prevention programs that were extensive and in some ways groundbreaking, but that still fell short of improving the graduation prospects of students identified as at risk in the city's junior and senior high schools. The Board of Education and the Office of the Mayor commissioned a substantial external evaluation of the most experimental of these programs, the Dropout Prevention Initiative (DPI) in 13 comprehensive high schools and 29 feeder middle schools. The evaluation findings and recommendations are now being used to create a new generation of programs in the city, especially Project Achieve and the United Way's Community Achievement Project in the Schools. The story of the DPI and its restructuring illuminates the obstacles, incentives, and inventions that can come into play in a large city school system's effort to strengthen its effectiveness for at-risk students.

School system context

Throughout the period between 1984-85 and 1990-91, the New York City school system included 632 elementary, 179 middle, and 119 comprehensive, vocational-technical, or alternative high

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schools. Between the beginning and the end of this brief span of years, the number of students enrolled increased from about 930,000 to about 970,000. The proportions of students who were Hispanic or Asian American increased, while the proportion of white students decreased. In 1990-91, 38% of the students were African American, 35% were Hispanic, 19% were white, 7.9% were Asian or Pacific Islander, and 0.1% were Native American.

There are schools in New York City in which dozens of languages are spoken. However, residential patterns have resulted in a majority of the schools having student populations that are predominantly African-American and/or Hispanic, while a small minority remain predominantly white. Asian students are increasingly scattered throughout the city, at the same time that a number of Asian-American enclaves have developed. Within and across these different groups, economic levels and achievement levels also influence the location of students in schools. Some affluent families who could afford private school send their children to public schools in order to educate them for a diverse society. However, at the same time that new families have been arriving from eastern Europe, a larger number of other whites have left the city's public schools. A triage structure is widely recognized to involve four or five levels of high schools in the city: the special public science and art schools, secular independent schools and parochial schools, theme and vocational public schools, the comprehensive zoned high schools, and alternative schools. (Cf. Hess, 1986; Hill, Foster, & Gendler, 1990). The most "at risk" students in the city are concentrated

in the zoned high schools and the elementary and middle schools that are their feeders.

Since 1970, the hiring and direct supervision of elementary and middle school staffs has been carried out by 32 community school districts covering the five boroughs of the city: the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island.[1] However, bureaucratic and job-protecting hiring and firing procedures maintained by the Board of Education in collusion with the United Federation of Teachers, along with budget constraints and local politics, greatly weakened community control over the schools and debilitated the leadership of the districts. Today, a more interventionist chancellor is beginning to challenge district decisions that appear not to be in the interest of the students. The most direct control that the central administration exercises over local elementary and middle schools is through the licensing of teachers and administrators, curriculum guidelines, city-wide reading and mathematics tests, the publication of School Profiles reporting test results for different groups and grade levels in each school, and the supervision of city-wide federal, state, and city funded special programs. Even this latter oversight, however, gets filtered through the community school districts, each with its own local board, superintendent, and supervisory staff.

The central office is more powerful, relatively, at the high school level. Here the Division of High Schools exercises direct control over budgets and the appointment of principals for the schools. The division carries out many of its policies through a

high school superintendent for each of the five boroughs and a superintendent for alternative schools. These superintendents are successful school administrators. They may vary in their capabilities as educational leaders, but their appointments are not as political as those of community school district superintendents. The coordination between the Division of High Schools and the six high school superintendents is thus much stronger than it is with the 32 community school districts that administer the elementary and middle schools. This is essential background for understanding the dropout problem in the city. Whatever the difficulties of articulation between junior and senior high schools might be in the nation's schools generally, they are exacerbated in a system where these levels are as differently governed as they have been in New York City up to now.

The "Board of Education," which until recently described the whole central apparatus of the city school system, signifies for many the quintessence of a mandarin bureaucracy. However, in its very size and differentiation into myriad separate departments and offices, it has historically fostered innovation on at least a limited or compartmentalized basis. Dale Mann has referred to New York as the "I've got one!" system, because whenever someone suggests a new program for the schools, the system turns out to have it already installed in one location or another. The current chancellor, however, is taking a decidedly more comprehensive and systemwide approach to reform than any previous chancellor. Virtually a third of central Board staff have been

retired or relocated in the districts within the past several years, and remaining staff have been reorganized more strategically. Remarkable improvements can be observed in some schools. At the same time, some other schools are still stalled in defeat. To insure that school system problems are understood, and that the past does not simply have to be repeated, it is necessary to report the evaluation findings in detail, and then to describe the new developments as best as current documentation allows.

The dropout prevention programs

Newspapers and advocacy groups in New York City pointed to high dropout rates in the city schools with increasing stridency during the early 1980s. In 1983, ASPIRA of New York claimed that as many as 68% of students entering ninth grade in New York City public schools never graduated from high school. (ASPIRA, 1983) Even the cross-sectional technique used by the Board of Education at that time estimated a dropout rate of 45.6% for 1982-83 and again for 1983-84. This percent began to decline in 1984-85, reaching an estimated 29.2% in 1986-87, but then turned up again in 1987-88 to 30.0% and in 1988-89 to 32.4%. (OREA, 1990) The preceding decline was at least partly a function of the Board's and the schools' learning how to discharge fewer students as dropouts, by tracing them to new schools when they left the city, transferring them to alternative schools and GED (General Equivalency Diploma) programs, and keeping truant or failing students on roster for a longer time. Concurrently with this, the Board instituted a second, more accurate method of counting

dropouts, the cohort study that made annual counts of the school status of all students entering the ninth grade in a given year, in junior or senior high school. This method of calculation showed increasing proportions of students completing a degree or the GED or dropping out after four, five, six, seven, and eight years following initial enrollment in ninth grade, and diminishing numbers of students still enrolled. The final status calculated in 1990 for the class of 1986 after eight years of enrollment was 28.3% dropouts, 57.3% graduates and other school completers, 14.4% transfers out and other discharges, and 0% students still enrolled. (OREA, 1990) Some perceive this as still an underestimation of the proportion of dropouts. It does not include students who did not even make it to ninth grade. Though it is not a distortion, the overall percentage masks the different percentages that obtain for different racial-ethnic groups. Since 1987, the Board has analyzed discharge status by racial-ethnic category, and has consistently found, parallel to national findings, that Hispanic students drop out at the highest rate, followed by African-Americans, with Asian/Pacific Islander and white students dropping out at the lowest rates.

The bulk of the explicitly designated "dropout prevention" effort in the city school system between 1984-85 and 1989-90 was conducted through the New York State funded Attendance Improvement/Dropout Prevention Program (AIDP). A program of supplementary student "services" in six areas (see below), the AIDP was implemented in 26 high schools and 69 feeder middle schools. In 1985-86, a Dropout Prevention Program (DPP) was

funded by the city to extend the effort into a new set of 10 high schools and 29 middle schools, but to go beyond the AIDP in stimulating systemic interventions in these high schools and in experimenting more broadly with the use of community based organizations (CBOs) at both the middle school and the high school level. Teachers College, Columbia University, was retained to evaluate the effort in the 10 DPP high schools, the 29 middle schools that were feeders to them, and, for purposes of comparison, three of the 26 AIDP high schools. Between 1985-86 and 1987-88, the "Dropout Prevention Initiative" (DPI) consisted of these 42 schools in the Teachers College evaluation. After that time, all of the AIDP and DPP schools were considered to be part of a Dropout Prevention Initiative. This chapter will use the term 'DPI' to refer to the program in the 42 schools (including 3 AIDP high schools) in the Teachers College evaluation, and 'DPP' to refer to the 10 high schools and 29 middle schools specifically.

The Teachers College evaluation was intensively qualitative as well as quantitative. A research assistant was assigned to each DPI high school and its feeder middle schools, to observe, interview, and administer surveys. These and still other research assistants also carried out a variety of special studies that cut across the schools. The Board of Education supplied a mass of data on the characteristics of students, services recorded, prior year and program year attendance, courses passed, credits earned, test scores, and school or discharge status. Community based organizations also cooperated in observations,

interviews, and the collection of service data. The evaluation was monitored by a Steering Committee consisting of representatives of the Board of Education, the Mayor's Office of Youth Services, and the Office of Management and Budget. Eight interim and final reports were produced between 1986 and 1990.[2] At the insistence of the Steering Committee, the reports were not distributed directly to the CBOs or the schools, but rather were submitted to the committee, which in turn was responsible for using the information. As it became apparent that the actual reports never did filter down to the schools and CBOs during the span of the evaluation, Teachers College took the liberty of sending abstracts and site-specific findings to the local programs.

The original Request for Proposals for the High School Dropout Prevention Program, issued in early 1985 by the Board of Education, summarized succinctly the thrust of both the middle school and the high school programs at that time:

> The purpose of this initiative is to identify those high school students most at risk of dropping out of school; to offer them services and to help them maintain a successful academic career. (New York City Board of Education, 1985, p. 11)

Each year between 1985-86 and 1987-88, an average of 150 students were enrolled in the DPI in each of the 29 middle schools; an average of 425 students a year were enrolled in each

of the 13 DPI high schools. These students met one criterion or more for program eligibility, beginning with poor attendance or a low rate of passing academic courses. *The number of students targeted for the DPI in the schools was substantially smaller than the number who met the program's eligibility criteria, especially in the high schools.* Some of the remaining students may have received services from other programs, particularly bilingual education programs. But many others were not targeted by any special program, though it was hoped that the DPI would have a positive "trickle-down" effect on them.

Students in the Dropout Prevention Initiative

Student characteristics were consistent over the three years of the DPI. At the middle school level, in each year, slightly more than half of the targeted students were male, and almost half were female; about one half of the targeted students were in the eighth grade, one third were in the seventh grade, and one fifth were in the ninth grade; nearly half the students were overage for grade, including a sixth or more who were at least two years overage for grade. The average prior year attendance of targeted students was below 80%, and between a third and a half of the students had been absent 40 days or more the prior school year; half or more of the students had failed two or more major courses in the prior year; well less than a tenth of the students were identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP), although substantially more students could be regarded as having marginal English proficiency. In a survey of DPP middle school students in Spring, 1987, 45% identified themselves as Hispanic

or Spanish, 32% responded Black or Afro-American, 8% Asian-American or Pacific Islanders, 4% White, and 9% Other.

In the DPI high schools, again slightly more than half of the targeted students were male, and almost half were female; over three quarters of the students were in the ninth and the tenth grades, while the smallest proportion were in the twelfth grade; at least three-quarters of the program students were one or more years overage for grade, and half of the students were at least two years overage; students' average prior year attendance was about 70% and between two- and three-fifths had been absent 40 or more days the prior year; the average student had passed less than half of his or her courses during the prior year in school; and again small percents were identified as LEP, although more might be regarded as having marginal English proficiency. The Spring, 1987 survey of high school students in the DPP found that 43% identified themselves as Hispanic or Spanish, 43% as Black or Afro-American, 4% as Asian-American or Pacific Islander, 2% as White, and 8% as Other.

These statistics reveal much about the structure of the dropout problem in the schools. That these were all individual students with strengths as well as vulnerabilities can get lost in an account like this one, as it can also in schools.

"Services": the program components

The DPI was meant to combine seven components of service to students: project facilitation, attendance outreach, guidance and counseling, health services, middle school/high school linkage, alternative educational programs, and increased school security

in most of the high schools. This was a formula that was thought to describe initial successes of the AIDP in some schools.

Facilitation or administration of the program was carried out by a facilitator in a middle school and by a coordinator in the high schools. At both levels, the role was meant to be filled by a teacher, though a few exceptions to this developed in the middle schools. Part of the role included responsibility for the funding process -- budgeting, procurement, and reimbursement. This threw up new obstacles in each year, especially for middle school facilitators, but at the same time the program did enhance the discretionary funds available in a school to use for student-related purposes. Facilitators and coordinators found their jobs were more manageable if they had full time appointments. But even if they were full time, the effectiveness of facilitators and of the dropout prevention team generally depended not only on their own skills but on DPI staff's being empowered by an actively supporting principal. This last point cannot be said too strongly.

The teams managed by facilitators in middle schools that did not involve a CBO generally included an attendance secretary, two family assistants, a guidance counselor or substance abuse worker, and teachers retained for extended-day (before- or after-school) activities. Where a CBO was involved, some of these staff were provided by the CBO, as case workers, for example, along with a site supervisor.

Larger and much more varied combinations of these kinds of staff were employed in the high schools, all of which involved at

least one CBO, and many of which had more extensive alternative education components than did the middle schools. In the middle schools, the total budget of school and CBO staff combined was set at $150,000 per school per year for each of the three years of the DPI. In the high schools, the total budgets varied between about $400,000 and about $800,000 per school per year. This was all supplementary funding, in addition to the regular tax-levy funding of the schools based on pupil populations.

Middle school program

Attendance outreach consisted of letters, phone calls, and home visits to absent students. School and CBO staff, including teachers, repeatedly testified that home visits were valuable. In the middle schools, they were often characterized as the most important part of the program. Records show that home visits frequently cast light on reasons for students' behavior in school, and sometimes elicited increased attendance support from a parent or guardian.

> He was living with father (totally unreliable), now living with mother. Had conference with grandmother and mother [who] assured us he will attend school -- marked improvement as of conference.

> Parent sends student to school. Student doesn't show. Mother claims it is school's problem. Outreach workers informed us that student comes from drug infested building -- possibility mother is involved.

Middle school home visits were usually made, or attempted (often no one was at home), by two family assistants traveling together. The Office of Student Progress (OSP), the school system central office that monitored the implementation of the DPP and the AIDP in the middle schools, expected teams to make at least fifteen home visits a week and required each participating school to complete a monthly form detailing how many home visits and other services each student received. DPP staff frequently protested this and other "paperwork," and the Teachers College evaluators recommended that the form be one that was more adapted to local goals, and be used only in alternate months. The dilemma that this suggestion (which OSP did not accept) awkwardly addressed was part of a more general conundrum for OSP, how to be responsive to local problems and at the same time uphold general program standards.

OSP also expected *guidance* counselors to hold at least fifteen individual and ten group guidance counseling sessions per week, and they were in this case quite explicit with the evaluators about the necessity of challenging the "culture" of guidance in the middle schools, where at least some counselors felt that only much lower numbers of guidance sessions were possible, given the paperwork they had to do, not just for the program but for high school admissions and various reports. Another key aspect was the intensity of help that some students required. Often an observer would find a counselor or case worker's morning or afternoon had been totally dominated by a single crisis. More generally, analysis of the service records

showed that some students were the focus of a large number of services, while at the other extreme a substantial fraction received few or no services, even in the categories where the greatest numbers of services were recorded.

Group counseling is one solution to the problem of reaching a large number of students. However, most guidance counselors or social workers had not been trained for group counseling, and interpretations of it varied from informal conflict management to didactic vocational education, along with a more deliberate group process model in a few schools.

School *linkage* activities were intended to smooth middle school students' transitions to high schools. High school staff or students might come to the middle school, or middle school students might visit the high school. In one middle school, the parents organization and a CBO arranged to have representatives of different high schools come to the middle school to make presentations. The most valued activity in the eyes of school staff was a middle school student's shadowing a high school student for part of a day. Linkage activities, however, were recorded less than once a year for the average DPP middle school student. While a few high schools were invested in recruiting students through linkage, others did not want to add more at-risk students to those they were already compelled to take from their zones. Moreover, high school budgets were approved later than middle school budgets, delaying the time when high schools could assign staff to linkage. To grasp the situation fully, one has to consider that, even though many of the possibilities were not

realistic options for a given student in terms of location in the city or chances of being admitted, students were confronted with a seeming array of dozens of choices of special programs in high schools throughout the city, along with the one high school zoned for their place of residence. Access to information about the high schools was, and continues to be, a major problem for the typical middle school student.

Health services also were recorded less than once a year for the average DPI middle school student. Health record reviews, vision and hearing screening, and physical examinations were all potentially involved, along with referrals to medical specialists or facilities for services the school could not provide. In 1987-88, a new city regulation that there be a Health Coordinator in every school was implemented in 27 of the 29 DPI middle schools, or in half of these cases had already been in effect before 1987-88. Since the actual services to students were performed by Department of Health personnel rather than by DPP staff, the level of services may have been higher than was recorded by DPI staff in some schools. It might be thought the average student would need only about one such service per year, but other data strongly contradict this. DPI staff surveyed in the middle schools said, with only a few exceptions, that health services were very inadequate for students' needs. A substantial proportion of the individual student cases recorded in Pupil Personnel Committee records (see below) involved a health component. Illness was far the most common explanation students themselves, surveyed by the Teachers College evaluation, cited

for their absence from school. Like the gap in middle school/high school linkage, the shortfall of health services stemmed partly from the difficulty of coordinating two administratively separate systems, in this case the Board of Education and the Board of Health.

Alternative education was never more than a supplement to the students' academic program in the middle schools, rather than a true alternative to conventional curriculum and teaching. Still, it was the area in which OSP attempted to change things the most between the first and the last years of the DPI. During the first two years (1985-86, 1986-87), alternative education had two components: 1) career education, which was scheduled once or twice a week as a pull-out program; and 2) before-school or after-school academic, enrichment, and recreational activities. The career education component featured "enterprise activities," designed to give students hands-on, productive work experience through activities such as making and selling T-shirts, logo buttons, and the like; patrolling the halls; making set designs for school assemblies; engaging in peer tutoring; and taking part in a variety of other activities. The before- and after-school activities included tutoring and homework help, but relatively few students participated in these.

School staff members who were not affiliated with the DPI questioned the value of the nonacademic alternative education activities. During the second year, an attempt was made to implement a more academic approach to career education, but this effort failed to involve students or staff. Therefore, the

evaluators recommended that the schools be given more control over the planning of the program, and a major revision of alternative education was planned in late 1986-87 for implementation in 1987-88. The schools were allowed to choose one of four models for alternative education: a mini-school model, a block program model, a remedial/enrichment teacher model, or a district-developed model (a wild-card category that allowed for still other possibilities). The mini-school and block program models particularly encouraged a more comprehensive approach to dropout prevention than had hitherto been possible.

Planning, selection of students, assignment of teaching responsibilities, and recruiting for new positions proceeded in the spring and early summer of 1987. In midsummer, however, the New York State Assembly stipulated that the federal Pupil Compensatory Education Need (PCEN) funds that the school system intended to use for alternative education could be used only for remedial education and only for students who scored below the 50th percentile on a standardized test. Thus many of the plans that schools had already made had to be scrapped, and staffing and student programs had to be revised.

The whole onset of the program in 1987-88 was delayed, and further unintended consequences followed. More than half (55%) of the targeted middle school students ended up being programmed for remediation (PCEN) or enrichment (paid for out of city funds for students who had relatively high test scores). These students were then "clustered" in groups separate from their regular classes. However, the clusters disproportionately

included the students who had good attendance in the early fall when the classes were being formed. At the end of the program year, the rates of attendance and of courses passed for the students who were clustered were found to be higher than those of the students who were not included in the clusters. The students in the clusters were also found to have received more services -- even more attendance outreach services -- than the 45% of targeted students who remained scattered in regular classes. However, regression analysis revealed that the outcomes were clearly attributable to the selection procedures, rather than to services, after prior attendance or courses passed was taken into account.

Middle school service frequencies and outcomes

In each year of the DPI, tens of thousands of services to targeted students were recorded. In 1987-88, the per-student averages in the various categories that the evaluation lumped together as "indirect services" were 7.1 mailings, 7.7 telephone calls, 0.9 autodials, 4.0 home visits (the students themselves were not usually involved), and 0.4 health record reviews. The averages for the various categories of "direct services" were 0.5 parent conferences, 3.6 student conferences (not by guidance personnel), 4.5 individual guidance sessions, 3.2 group guidance, 0.5 parent guidance, 1.8 attendance incentives, 5.4 extended days, 0.7 high school linkage activities, 0.03 physical examinations, 0.2 visual screenings, and 0.2 hearing screenings. For over half of the students, remediation or enrichment was scheduled on a nearly daily basis. One can be impressed by how

much supplementary support for students the program generated in some categories. At the same time, it is already possible, on the basis of the findings presented in this account so far, to be skeptical of the impact the program would have on the long-term success of the students in school. In addition to the health and linkage problems, these services did not seem to be enough to counterbalance the boredom and failure students were experiencing in the main academic program of the schools. "Boredom" is shorthand for much of what students themselves told interviewers about the "chalk and talk" routine of their regular classes, while "failure" stands first of all for failing courses, but more generally for the experiences students had in accumulating low grades and test scores.

For each year of the DPP, the evaluation compared targeted middle school students' attendance rates and rates of passing courses with the same students' rates in the previous year, when most of them were not yet enrolled in the program. No progress in arresting middle school students' attendance declines was demonstrated between the first and the third years of the DPI. The attendance rates for targeted students in the middle schools in 1985-86 were 77% for the prior year and 73% for the program year. The attendance rates for targeted students in 1986-87 declined only slightly, but the attendance rates for targeted students in 1987-88 reverted to the first year's pattern. And in both 1986-87 and 1987-88, attendance changes were similar for comparison samples of students who were eligible for services but not targeted in the same DPP middle schools. (It now occurs to

the writer that this may not have been a valid comparison. If the targeting for the program successfully included students with a pattern of truancy in the prior year, and excluded students who had been absent on account of illness or an extended vacation, the nonprogram students might have been expected to attend in the following year at a higher rate than the program students.)

In all three program years, the targeted students in the middle schools slightly improved the average proportion of courses passed over the previous year. Thus it appears that the program arrested a decline in the number of courses passed that might otherwise have been expected. (No comparison data were available to validate this assumption.) Still, the resultant rate of passing courses in each program year -- slightly above 70% -- was substantially below what would be required to predict that these middle school students would have a good chance of succeeding in high school.

An exceptional middle school

Of course, there were variations among the middle schools. The evaluation made intensive studies of the schools with the greatest gains and the greatest losses in student outcomes. These cases do not easily lend themselves to generalization. In each of the four most successful schools, however, something special transformed the program into more than the sum of its components. One middle school in which program students gained in attendance in all three years of the DPI, and where there were substantial gains in courses passed by targeted students, combined intensive monitoring of services to individual students

with substantive and structural changes for staff, students, and their parents. *All* DPI students in this school were block programmed (in effect, clustered) for part of the day. Teachers and program guidance and outreach staff ate lunch together every day -- a very unusual situation in the professional and social life of staff in the schools generally. The program involved large numbers of parents in dinners, health workshops, and career fairs, again in distinct contrast to nearly all of the other schools. Career enterprise activities in the school included a chocolates factory, a greenhouse, and a school supplies store, where students were observed learning management and marketing skills and working responsibly in teams. The principal's "creative rule-bending" helped make these activities possible. Program staff kept very close track of students' attendance throughout the school day and posted attendance and service details daily on wall charts. Ironically, this school was in the doghouse with both district and central OSP administrators because it did not maintain adequate service records and school store accounts for a couple of years. Still more ironically, the program in this school several years before had inspired the model that the DPP and AIDP were now trying to implement in other middle schools citywide. To make the matter even more dramatic, the school was located in a neighborhood that was notorious for drug-related crime. The evaluation called renewed attention to the remarkable gains made by program students in this school.

High school program

The DPI in the high schools was much more varied than in the

middle schools, not just because of individual school variation, but because of planned variation in the schools' mode of delivering services to students. The original design called for some of the DPI schools to use a "case management" approach and others a more "systemic" approach. In the first mode, services were to be delivered directly to the several hundred students who would be targeted by the DPI in a given school. In the second, services were to be delivered by strengthening sectors of the school program and staff that included or impacted on targeted students, but not for these students exclusively. The ultimate interpretation of the more systemic approach was the slogan of the DPI program in one of the schools, "Every student is at risk." In this case, lists of at-risk students were developed to justify budget parameters, but the lists were not actually used to distribute services to students.

As in the middle schools, it was intended in the high schools that some schools would use community based organizations while other schools would not. The abstract design called for four service delivery "models": pure systemic, in which services would be directed basically toward changing the school environment (3 schools); modified systemic, in which some case management services would be provided by CBOs (3 schools); modified CBO, in which case management services provided by CBOs would be augmented with some funding for systemic services (4 schools); and pure CBO, composed almost entirely of case management services (the 3 AIDP schools included in the DPI for comparison). One problem that the evaluation found inherent in

this design itself was the equation of case management strategy with the employment of a CBO. The design did not allow for looking at case management vs. systemic distribution, and school vs. CBO staff, as two independent variables. Moreover, every high school elected to spend at least some of its budget on one or more community based organizations. The evaluation collapsed the categories to modified systemic (now six schools), modified CBO case management, and pure CBO case management. Program implementation fit these categories in a general sense. However, there was so much variation between individual schools even within models that it was necessary to focus on individual schools and different combinations of schools trying different things, more than on the categories of schools that the design suggested, in order to understand the impact of program on students.

In addition to this experimentation with models, a more developmental approach was taken toward program in the ten DPP high schools generally. The DPP in these schools was supervised by a specially appointed Superintendent for Dropout Prevention, whose office promoted innovation in the schools. New ideas were often discussed at the monthly meetings of the 10 DPP high school coordinators, and budgets encouraged followup of these ideas. Correspondingly, however, the Superintendent for Dropout Prevention downplayed monitoring of the program implementation. Apart from a one-time annual checkoff of categories of service provided to students in the program, the only systematic programwide recording of services was done for a central Board

office overseeing how the CBOs fulfilled their contracts, and for an evaluation substudy of services to samples of 40 students in each of five of the high schools in 1987-88. The kinds of data available to the evaluation were thus quite different from those at the middle school level, although the evaluation examined program implementation in different specific service areas through several of its substudies. More relevant here is the possible contribution of the DPP superintendency's relaxed management style, or perhaps simply its congruence with a "loose coupling" (as it is so aptly named in Weick, 1976) of the local units providing services to students. Whereas in the middle schools, the Monthly Summary of Services Report concentrated information about each student in one place, information was much more scattered in the high schools. The Teachers College logs of services to samples of targeted students suggested that, for most of the students, no one person was keeping track of a given student, even in the schools that allegedly used a "case management" approach. For example, the logs showed that an individual student was likely to receive counseling from several different school counselors or CBO staff members, rather than from one counselor consistently.

Attendance outreach was conducted in every high school in the city system by an attendance teacher who, on released time and with paraprofessional assistance, was responsible for collecting attendance data, identifying students with excessive absences, and initiating communications to absent students' homes, for all students in the school. DPI funds were used to

add paraprofessional attendance outreach staff to the central attendance office, or to subschools in one instance, in the six modified systemic schools and in one of the modified CBO case management schools, but not in the remaining CBO case management schools. Attendance monitoring and outreach tended to be perceived as a (school) central office function that was carried out for DPI and non-DPI students alike, even where DPI funds paid for additional staff. A substudy of processes used to monitor attendance and discharge students found that in most of the high schools, there was not a formal mechanism by which the attendance office or other school personnel even knew which students had been targeted for DPI services. Attendance was monitored for the whole school body rather than just for DPI students alone. For a variety of reasons -- because school and CBO staff had minimal communication in some cases, because DPI status was not yet a regular part of a computerized student information file, or because in some schools all students were regarded as being at risk, and therefore "targeting" was done only for budget request purposes and not for actual distribution of services -- the schoolwide monitoring of attendance sometimes duplicated, but was rarely coordinated, with the monitoring by a counselor, social worker, teacher, or other staff involved with the dropout prevention program.

Despite the fact that it has provided a transition here, "management style" is not the factor that one would list first to explain why outreach services to high school DPI students were poorly coordinated. The sheer size of the problem, i. e., the

number of students who might be absent on a given school day (perhaps 500 in a school of 2500), a lack of up-to-date information on students' addresses and phone numbers, and a shortage of resources, especially telephones, were main factors that typically had to be dealt with by attendance outreach. A great deal of time was devoted to resolving questions in the fall about which students should even be expected to attend, and "long term absentee" cases soaked up time throughout the year. Schools had to prioritize, using many different criteria, how to approach those cases for which time even allowed them to have discretion. Many inventive ways to deal with these problems were discovered. For example, in one school valid current addresses were collected from many students by requiring that they be written on a raffle ticket. In another school, students were asked to give the name of a fellow student in the school, through whom they could be reached in the event of an emergency. This resourcefulness not withstanding, however, in most of the DPI high school programs the lists of targeted students were not used to provide more intensive attendance outreach to these students than to students who were not targeted.

The dimensions of the problem the high schools faced are illustrated as well by *orientation*, the high school counterpart to the middle-school linkage component. At one high school a very well-planned program for the week before school -- late August and early September -- had a daily schedule of breakfast, assembly, activities, lunch, and sports. Upperclass students served as mentors in the program. At the time of planning for

the orientation, about 500 students had been identified from notices sent from the middle schools, and were mailed announcements; of these 500 letters, about 150 were returned as having the wrong address. Orientation staff members reported that the actual attendance totaled about 80; this represents a small fraction of the 600 students new to high school who eventually registered at the school. Interviews of randomly selected samples of ninth grade students from four of the high schools found that very few reported having gone on tours of their high school either the spring before, during orientation, or during the first few weeks of school. Indeed, suprisingly few of the students targeted for DPI services in their first year in high school had even been in a DPI program in middle school.

In most of the high schools in the DPI, more staff were hired for *guidance and counseling* than for any other component of the dropout prevention program. In four of the five high schools in which a log of services was maintained in 1987-88, the highest number of contacts per average student was recorded by guidance and counseling staff. Reflecting the slender coordination with attendance outreach staff per se, substantial fractions of even the counselors' contacts -- in one school 19% of their contacts, in another 24%, and in a third fully 43% of counselors' contacts with students -- were for attendance outreach. Guidance counselors complained about this in response to the evaluation survey. Despite the DPI's heavy investment in guidance and counseling personnel, counselors were generally perceived both by themselves and by other high school staff as very overloaded.

Typical comments from an evaluation survey of staff included these:

> Caseloads for CBO workers are very high, approximately 110 students per CBO counselor. The crises in our students' lives are often unremitting and debilitating. We are requesting a [school] AIDP Guidance Counselor to help ease the burden.

> Take the big load off one counselor. Give her 50 kids and [let her] follow them til graduation. Don't overload or breakup established rapport.

> Those students who have received the full panoply of [CBO] services have benefitted greatly, but very few students have had [this] skills training. The primary focus has been on guidance, which most likely could be done as well by Board of Education personnel were the funds available to employ them.

> Counselors today have to push paper too much. They need to be helped to develop profiles to identify pre-dropout behavior and intervene before the student goes too far astray.

Extensive *health* services were available on site to students in only two of the thirteen high schools. These two schools had

a comprehensive health program funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. One of these same schools also had a LYFE program that supported young mothers in school, including day care for their infants. At the other extreme, one school did not even have the city mandated health coordinator. Other schools had more or less availability of a nurse or a health coordinator, had pregnancy prevention activities, a drug counseling program, or other special services, but nothing that began to approach a comprehensive health program. Yet, as in the middle schools, illness was far the most common explanation that surveyed high school students gave for their absences from school.

Relatively few health referrals were reported in high school counselors' logs, although more might have occurred than the evaluation captured. The point here is not that the Dropout Prevention Initiative itself had failed to deliver on promised services, but that the fiction of referring students to other resources was literally a bandaid on a cancer. If good health is a sine qua non for school success, and was at the same time the most neglected of the stipulated components of the dropout prevention effort, this factor alone would have depressed the student outcomes of the DPI.

In the ten DPP high schools, program funding was used to beef up *security* personnel and equipment. An automated building entry/attendance system was installed in each of the schools under this component. Testimony and incident reports indicated, at best, mixed returns from these investments. School security staff members were often perceived to be adding to the problem of

conflict between students by arbitrarily ignoring the behaviors of some and confronting others. Consistently positive results were found, however, for another intervention, a peer mediation and conflict resolution program, Project SMART, implemented in five of the DPP high schools by Victims Service Agency, a CBO. In all five of these schools, the incidence of suspensions for aggression against other students dropped dramatically in the year following the start-up of the program. Deans had to yield some of their territory to students, and evaluation staff observed that students took their new responsibility seriously. Social learning in this project appeared to be substantially more positive than what could be picked up from the not-so-hidden curriculum of conflict and antagonism that was familiar to virtually all students.

Between the first and the third years of the DPI, there was an increasing emphasis on the *alternative education* component of the high school program. In the third year, over half of the students were involved in one or another of a variety of activities, including peer and adult tutoring, enrichment courses, mini-schools or blocked academic programs, career education and job training, and a part-time jobs program. However, it is necessary to observe right off that these were rarely complementary activities. That is, some students got tutoring, others got a special program or flexible scheduling, and still others received part-time jobs, but few students had a combination of these supports.

For example, a small fraction of the students were placed in

part-time, after-school jobs, with minimum wages subsidized by the DPI. Job developers in the high schools identified employers who would create and supervise the jobs, which generally required that students work 15 hours a week. Students surveyed gave positive appraisals to jobs that entailed working with other people or with data, while they were less positive about jobs like maintenance and food preparation. They reported using the money as much for family as for personal needs. Students in the Jobs Program tended to have rates of prior-year attendance and courses passed that were higher than those of targeted students not in the program. When this factor was controlled for in regression analysis, however, participation in the Jobs Program still had positive effects on attendance and courses passed. On the other hand, participants in 1987-88 still passed just 53% of their courses during the program year, a far lower proportion than would allow the average student to complete high school in a reasonable length of time. The Jobs Program illustrates concretely the more general observation that academic and social supports were not well coordinated in the DPI. Only half of these students received counseling and few were involved in any other alternative education. The Jobs Program students were doing better on the whole than other students in the DPI, but they still needed a fuller and more integrated package of social and academic supports to enable them to obtain a high school diploma.

A "PM School," one of the principal inventions of the DPI, originated in the high school that went farthest in trying to

implement a systemic model. PM School students voluntarily attended one or two late-afternoon classes in order to make up courses or to gain credits toward early graduation. They selected their courses in face-to-face registration with the teachers, a feature that gave them the opportunity to find out directly about a teacher and a class before signing up. The classes observed by evaluators exhibited a lively, hands-on style of teaching that encouraged participation. However, in this school in which every student was regarded as at risk, the average rates of attendance and of courses passed for 1987-88 PM School students were considerably higher during the year before they enrolled in the program than the corresponding rates for targeted students not participating in the PM School. Thus the evaluation asked, how can such an opportunity be made more attractive to the students who need it the most?

An on-site GED program yielded promising outcomes. Although less than 7% of the students enrolled in the DPI between 1985-86 and 1987-88 passed the GED examination, fully one-quarter of those who passed were enrolled in the one high school in the DPI that had a state-approved GED program on the school premises. In this instance, career education and counseling staff of the CBO, Federated Employment Guidance Services (FEGS), worked closely with school staff. Intensive courses taught by school staff members prepared the students for examinations in reading, writing, social studies, mathematics, and science. Off-site GED preparation facilities turned out not to be as effective.

Several mini-schools and blocked academic programs created

an ambience that students said felt more like "family" than regular school did. However, the curriculum of these programs was derived from the curriculum of the schools generally, and was only superficially adapted to the needs or interests of targeted students. One of these was an off-campus program that was located at a nearby college in the City University of New York. Students appreciated the college environment, but their courses, taught by teachers from the sending high school, did not reflect the college substantively. Another was a "just community" program in which students participated together in a daily social-issues focused course and in a weekly community meeting, but took most of their courses in the regular program. In these special programs, as in the DPI generally, the average student passed even fewer courses during the program year than he or she had the previous year.

Peer tutoring appeared to be haphazardly managed and was associated with substantial losses in courses passed. Adult tutoring resulted in a modest gain in courses passed, but very few students were recorded as receiving tutoring by adults.

Staff of the Dropout Prevention Initiative exerted themselves tremendously. They cared about the students, were continually involved in crisis management of one kind or another, and contributed to a variety of program innovations. Nonetheless, the picture that emerged from reviewing the services overall was one in which the average student did not receive anything like the full complement of services that the program rationale called for. As in the middle schools, the DPP for most

of the students was an "add-on" rather than a transformation of their school experience. A longitudinal study that will be described below found that only about one fifth of the program students in the middle schools and high schools altogether had even been targeted for services in more than one year. From the standpoint of continuity of services, this proportion was very low. The finding raised another doubt about the "services" concept that underlay the dropout prevention program.

High school outcomes

The high school students targeted in 1985-86 had a prior year's attendance rate of 72%, which declined to 63% in the program year. Those targeted in 1986-87 declined in attendance from 71% to 62%, and those targeted in 1987-88 declined from 69% to 64%. The attendance loss was thus somewhat lower in the third year of the program than in its first two years. However, the resultant attendance rates were similar in all three years and put the average student at substantial risk of becoming a dropout. Attendance losses were comparable for samples of students in the last two years who were identified as at risk but not targeted for DPI services. (These high school comparisons still appear to be valid.)

The rate at which the average high school student targeted in 1985-86 passed courses went from 44% in the prior year (when a small fraction of them were still in middle school) to 35% in the program year. The corresponding figures for students targeted in 1986-87 were 48% and 41%; for those targeted in 1987-88, the figures were 47% and 43%. The decline in the rate of passing

courses was thus slightly less in the second and third years of the program than in the first year. However, the resultant rate of passing courses was much lower than was necessary if students were to have a reasonable chance of obtaining a high school diploma. Grades were not available for comparison students.

Students entering a high school from another school, usually a middle school, suffered particularly disasterous results. The average newly entered targeted student passed roughly 20% fewer courses in his or her first year in high school compared to the year before. Course failure led to retention, students piled up in the ninth and tenth grades, and the highest rates of dropout discharges were incurred by ninth and tenth grade students.

A longitudinal study examined outcomes for targeted middle school and high school students from each of the three cohorts of the DPI -- Year One (1985-86), Year Two (1986-87), and year Three (1987-88) -- cumulatively from 1984-85 through the end of the 1987-88 school year. High school targeted students lost as much attendance in the year following a given program year as they had during the program year itself. By the end of 1987-88, 15% of the First Cohort of targeted high school students had graduated from high school or received a GED and another 12% were still in school or were enrolled in a GED program. At the same time, 51% had been discharged as dropouts. (Another 10% were discharged not as dropouts and data were missing for 12%.) The dropout discharges began in the program year at a rate of 16%, proceeded at a higher rate in the following year, 21%, and then occurred at close to the initial rate in the third year (the second year

after the initial program year), 14%. A similar pattern was seen to be developing for the Second and Third Cohorts. Thus the school completion rate that was anticipated for all three of the high school cohorts was very low.

The longitudinal study of middle school students found they too lost attendance substantially in the year(s) following a given year in the program, that is, on top of the losses already sustained during the program year. The resultant rates of attendance indicated a similar trajectory could be anticipated for these students in high school.

Results for community based organizations

Community based organizations established a very definite presence in the schools. At least where they had appropriate space, their offices were often observed to be lively and comfortable places for students. High proportions of CBO staff, especially relative to high school teachers and administrators, were ethnic or racial minority persons. An evaluation substudy in the middle schools found that in schools under contract to a local CBO there were higher levels of student satisfaction with the program and more positive staff perceptions of CBO relationsips with other school staff, students, and parents, than in schools which had contracted with a CBO from outside the community school district. Counseling and attendance outreach were the central activities of most of the CBOs, but, as indicated above, some also offered job readiness training, conflict resolution, or other activities to promote personal and social development. An observation frequently made by CBO staff

is captured in this remark from one of the high schools:

> [CBO] has been able to support students returning to school after a long term absence provided that they also find some academic success in their transitional or GED classes . . . We have found that individual and group sessions can build self-esteem, but that once they encounter negative experiences academically again, it all falls apart.

At the middle school level, differences in outcomes between the 14 schools in which a CBO was involved and the 15 schools in the school-alone model were quite small in all three years and were generally accounted for by initial differences in student characteristics. In the high schools, in both the second and the third years, students who were served by a combination of school and CBO staff tended to have somewhat better attendance and courses passed outcomes than students who were served only by school staff or only by CBO staff. Two of the three AIDP schools were particularly salient instances of this, despite the fact that they represented a so-called "pure CBO" model. Ironically (given that they were outside the DPP that commissioned the evaluation), AIDP administrators were the ones who took the first year findings of the evaluation most seriously, and immediately began to have teachers of the schools integrate courses for targeted students around a theme the teachers selected. At the same time, the CBOs continued to offer personal-social supports to students. The resulting programs were still only a slice of

what needed to happen, not least because the larger school environment in which a program was housed continued to be an overwhelmingly negative factor in the daily life of the schools. However, losses for targeted students, particularly in courses passed, were lower in these schools than in the program overall. Within the DPP, students in one of the mini-school programs received a combination of academic, attendance, and counseling services that resulted from CBO (in this case, Good Shepherd Services) and school personnel working closely together. Other targeted students in the same school were served by more fragmented units, including "case management," a health promotion program, or after-school social activities. The students in the mini-school did relatively well, while the students served by the latter activities alone did relatively poorly.

In the high schools, the average cost of the DPI per student was somewhat lower in the modified CBO and "pure" CBO models that relied heavily on community based organizations, than in the modified systemic schools that relied mainly on school personnel. (Even though teachers were required to develop themes in the AIDP schools, no budget was allocated to this.) In the middle schools, expenditures per student were substantially higher in the CBO model than in the school-alone model, even after taking fringe benefits into account. This especially reflected the fact that in the second and third years, fewer students were targeted in most of the CBO middle schools than in the school-alone schools, on account of ambiguity about how many students school staff themselves were expected to serve in the CBO schools in

addition to the students served by CBO staff. This pointed once again to the need to develop more collaborative relationships between CBO and school staff in most of the schools in which CBOs were working.

Overall appraisal of the DPI in relation to its goals

In each year, one of the chancellor's goals for the DPI was that at least 50% of the targeted students improve their attendance over their attendance in the previous year. In fact, 49% of the targeted middle school students in 1986-87 improved their attendance, while in 1987-88 47% improved their attendance. A second goal was that at least 50% of those targeted students who had failed a course in the previous year improve their course pass rate in the program year. In 1986-87, 59% of these students improved their percent of passing courses, and in 1987-88, 63% gained in rate of passing courses. On these grounds, the program in the middle schools could have been declared to be a success. However, by focusing just on those students with previous course failures, the second goal particularly capitalized on regression to the mean. When *all* targeted middle school students in 1987-88 were considered, 37% passed more courses during the program year than they had the previous year, 32% passed fewer, and 31% stayed the same. Considering that a middle school pass rate of less than 75% of major courses appears to be a strong predictor of academic difficulty in high school, while the average rate of passing courses in the program year was lower than this, the program had to be viewed as just holding the line against the forces that would eventually result in students dropping out.

In 1986-87, 35% of the targeted high school students improved their attendance over the previous year, and in 1987-88, 39% improved their attendance. Of the targeted high school students who had previously failed a course, 43% and 42% improved their course pass rate in the two years respectively. When *all* targeted high school students were considered in 1987-88, however, 36% had gains in courses passed, 15% stayed the same, and 49% had losses in percent of courses passed.

A very understandable reaction of staff who have invested so much in trying to help students is that turning around even a few justifies the effort they have made. However, there was little evidence that the program, as distinguished from more individual actions of program staff and students themselves, contributed to these gains. Or, at another level of observation, it was through the relatively scarce coincidings of positive program factors that students gained the most.

Another, related reaction is that the students have such great needs that it is unreasonable to expect the school to be able to ameliorate their situation. But focusing so centrally on the students' needs seems to have diverted attention from the schools' role in the problem. An analysis of the records kept by Pupil Personnel Committee (PPCs) in the middle schools threw light on this. The PPC in each school included administrators, outreach and guidance staff, and teachers. In 677 recorded discussions of students' cases in 20 schools during the 1987-88 school year, the principal concerns for male students were home problems and discipline and for females were home problems and

health issues. This and related patterns suggested a gender stereotyping, of both student behavior and its interpretation.[3] Even more significant was the finding that staff *never* attributed students' absences or their inadequate academic performance to difficulties arising from teachers, curriculum or some other feature of the school itself. This undoubtedly reflected the fact that these were documents that might have been used to question teachers. Still, some language might have been used to reflect such concerns. The targeted students attended school for the greatest percentage of days in September and then for decreasing percentages through most of the subsequent months, suggesting that more than problems at home accounted for the attendance patterns. Indeed, this particular finding, as much as any other, seized the attention of the new chancellor's staff reading the final report in 1990, and galvanized the argument for a more thoroughgoing, schoolwide approach to dropout prevention.

Evaluation recommendations and school system response

Over the course of several years, the evaluators made many recommendations. As early as the second year of the DPI, the Board of Education responded positively to some of them. These responses included the facilitation of the contracting process for CBOs, the inclusion of not-targeted students in the DPI incentives program, facilitating re-entry for students returning to the middle schools from long absences, and increasing alternative education options in the high school programs. As summarized earlier, the Board's attempt to increase school and district control over the middle school DPI program in 1987-88

was defeated by the New York State Assembly's late and highly constraining specification of how alternative education funds could be spent.

But what the evaluation increasingly called for was a comprehensive restructuring of students' experience in school. There was some evidence that when students increased their attendance by more than about ten percent, their course performance also improved. However, attendance changes of this magnitude occurred for very few students. To improve the rate of courses passed, the evaluation concluded, instructional issues had to be addressed. This could not be accomplished just through remedial instruction, which was not found to result in substantial achievement gains, but also required reform of the core academic program.

Most of the intermediate and junior high schools of New York City bore little resemblance, in organization, curriculum, or social climate, to what the term "middle schools" has come to stand for in educational discussions today. This observation translated into three recommendations focused on the middle schools themselves:

1. School staff generally should look for opportunities for positive communications with students and their families, particularly trying to build up a reservoir of positive exchanges before sending negative information to the home.

2. Given the finding that students' highest rate of attendance was in September and that attendance early in the year was highly predictive of attendance and courses passed later in the year, the schools must be ready to welcome students with an engaging program and supportive services from the beginning of the school year in September.

3. Schools should build their instructional programs on students' perceptions of the instruction that they find most helpful to them for learning. Observations and interviews of students suggested that these practices include a combination of direct instruction and hands-on activity, with teachers taking time to explain things patiently to students.

Other recommendations focused more on the relationships between the middle schools and the high schools, community based organizations, and the Board of Education. In order to enjoy school success, students clearly required counseling, crisis intervention, and health services and referrals. However, if the community based organizations were going to perform these services more effectively than school personnel, or complementing the efforts of school personnel, it would require a higher level of coordination between the CBO and the school than was observed in most of the schools or districts. The Board's requirements for documentation of services may or may not have been excessive, but in either case they were geared to external categories and

quotas of services and not manifestly related to school or CBO staff's own need for information to help them reach program goals. The relationships between the middle schools and the high schools, and between the schools and health agencies, were very weak.

4. The schools need to take much stronger measures to facilitate middle school students' orientation to high schools.

5. Schools need to assess the adequacy of their counseling and health resources, both to rationalize the best use of the resources they already have, and to inform city and state authorities of the needs of students in the schools.

6. Schools need to decide what information about student performance and services to students will best aid them in reaching dropout prevention goals, and the Board of Education should work with the schools to develop ways of obtaining and updating this information.

7. Central and borough or district Board of Education personnel should share expertise and decision-making power with local school personnel in all of these matters. Long and short range goals should be set within a framework of mutual respect and accountability.

The evaluation's recommendations for the high schools were too complex to be enummerated in this way. Dropout prevention needed to become a schoolwide concern, rather than the special responsibility of add-on staff only. The evaluation recommended that instead of funding simply on the basis of the number of at-risk students identified in a school, three levels of funding be used for successively more comprehensive and systemic approaches in a school. The schools were urged to combine flexibly scheduled, experience-based courses and courses preparing students for GED programs and examinations, with part-time employment and appropriate academic and social supports, for all students who wished to pursue these options. User friendly computer programs were needed to give each school a capacity to generate its own data to answer its own questions and simultaneously to allow data to be merged at district, city, and state levels. Houses or subschools of less than 500 students were recommended to promote bonding and facilitate communication among staff and with students.[4] At the same time, it was essential that an adult mentor or advisor convey to each student the high expectations and caring that emerge as the top and bottom lines of dropout prevention.

Certain of the recommendations, particularly part-time employment, tutoring, and mentoring, called for major increases in the schools' resources through alliances with employers in both the private and the public sectors. More fundamentally, the ratio of adults to children and youths in the city's classrooms was seen to be far too low, in the high schools as much as in the

elementary and middle schools, and needed to be altered by restructuring the school experience.

The evaluation had found that services fell short of program expectations most conspicuously in areas that required crossing organizational boundaries: health, which needed coordination between the Board of Education and the Health Department; and school linkage, which required collaboration between the middle schools and the high schools, at both the central office and the district levels. Formal and informal boundaries also had to be crossed to encourage parent participation, to offer services to students with limited proficiency in English,[5] in fostering collaboration between schools and community organizations, and even in coordinating activities between discrete units within the schools themselves. The school system was urged to pay profound attention to improving communication and increasing collaborative action across formal and informal organizational and cultural boundaries.

The high school final report recommended not only school-based planning, but the incorporation of CBOs into this planning, at least if CBOs were going to be employed in the schools. This reflected partly the evolution of the evaluators' own thinking between finishing the middle school and the high school reports. It reflected also a greater openness to such a recommendation at the high school level, stemming from the strides that had already been made through the more systemic approach of the Dropout Prevention Program in the high schools. Teachers College strongly urged that contracts with CBOs be made at the individual

school level, with heavy input from each school, rather than the Board's making a single, general purpose contract with a CBO for work in several schools. This was a direct challenge to the political power of the CBO that had received the lion's share of CBO funding under the DPI, Federated Employment Guidance Services. Perhaps as much as any single recommendation, this one needed to be made by an outside party that had carefully weighed the information on a school by school basis.

A central recommendation was that student outcomes, not just levels of services, be examined regularly in order to make successive approximations to program objectives. "Keep your eye on the ball" was argued to be a common sense way of saying what studies of individual and organizational behavior confirm, that goals are essential for regulating complex programs and actions. Schools were urged to set long and short range goals that were both challenging and attainable, and to be accountable for these goals. For the most part, top administrators and DPI staff had dismissed the negative findings of the first two years regarding attendance rates and courses passed, holding that it would take three or more years for the interventions to produce substantial results. This stance ensured greater continuity than had been possible in earlier programs with shorter fuses. On the other hand, it also led to underestimating the importance of the evaluation findings. The results were only taken seriously when two new chancellors -- first Richard Green in 1988, and then Joseph Fernandez in 1990 -- each came from outside to head the school system, and each used the evaluation reports to get a

picture of the system that he was inheriting.

Chancellor Green's staff began to implement a more comprehensive and systemic approach in the DPI high schools in 1989-90 through adopting the three-level funding strategy and through widening the program to include, potentially, all ninth and tenth grade students. The Teachers College final longitudinal report was transmitted to the Steering Committee and the Board of Education in January, 1990, just as Joseph Fernandez was beginning his tenure as chancellor. A new Office of Strategic Planning established by Chancellor Fernandez commissioned central Board teams to develop a white paper synthesizing the findings and recommendations of Teachers College and the Board's own Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (OREA), which had evaluated the AIDP program parallel to the DPP. A crucial table in the Teachers College high school report showed that, when account was taken of OREA's having calculated outcomes only for those students with two years' full data (thus omitting students who were discharged as dropouts before completing the program year), the results of the two evaluations were very similar. OREA now swung in fully behind the Teachers College conclusions, which were very heavily drawn upon for the white paper, *Dropout Prevention Initiatives FY 1986 to 1990: Lessons from the Research*. (Division of Strategic Planning/Research and Development, 1990)

Simultaneously with the release of this paper, in May, 1990, the Board of Education announced a redesigned dropout prevention program in the high schools, Project Achieve. A Division of High

Schools memorandum to high school superintendents, selected principals, parent association presidents, and community based organizations, summarized still more succinctly the evaluation findings and recommendations. Overall program goals were to improve student performance outcomes and to increase successful school completions. Special emphasis was to be placed on results for ninth and tenth grade students.

Thirty-two high schools, from both the DPP and the AIDP, were selected for Project Achieve. School-based committees in the participating schools would first engage in a comprehensive self-assessment to determine site-based needs, including a review of all support *and* instructional programs (the Division of High School's italics). Their findings were to be prepared for presentation to external visiting teams, each comprised of a borough superintendent, a representative of the High School Division, a principal or assistant principal, teacher and parent representatives, and a university/and or corporate representative. A plan jointly developed by the internal and the external teams would be submitted to the Division of High Schools for approval and funding. At critical junctures during the school year, the school teams would be asked to meet again with external review teams, to review progress, develop joint strategies to improve student outcomes, and revise the program as appropriate. Schools were urged to "utilize all available resources -- both internal and external, public and private, tax levy and reimbursable -- to address compelling problems creatively" (Division of High Schools, 1990) and were given full

latitude to pursue school-based solutions. Critical elements to be included in the plans were accountability for student performance outcomes, school based management/shared decision making, systemic changes to redesign the delivery and integration of instructional and support services, use of CBOs in this process, focus on the needs of incoming students, continuous monitoring of students' performance outcomes, effective parent involvement programs, and "commitment on the part of schools, superintendencies and the High School Division to *collaborate* and to take *collective responsibility* for the *success* of this program." (*Ibid*). Goals were specified for dropout rates, attendance, credit accumulation, and Regents Competency Tests in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics. For example, using the 1988-89 school year as a baseline, the difference between the Chancellor's Minimum Standard of 85 percent attendance, excluding long term absentees (LTAs), and the school's average daily attendance rate of 9th and 10th graders was to be reduced by 60% over a three year period. At all three levels of possible funding, goals and objectives had to be projected in three areas, restructuring/houses, improving the instructional program, and school-based planning and management.

The Project Achieve announcement strongly stressed collaboration with community based organizations. In a bold move to add new resources to the dropout prevention effort, the United Way of New York City was engaged to serve as an umbrella organization for the identification of community groups to provide needed services, and for management and monitoring of

CBOs' participation in Project Achieve. In 1990-91, the United Way oversaw the work of 51 CBOs with which the Board had previously contracted. This number of participating CBOs was already a considerable expansion over the 15 or so that had been involved in the earlier DPI. Beginning in 1991-92, the United Way would itself manage the recruitment and applications of CBOs to work in the Project Achieve schools, and also in elementary and middle schools eligible for programs for at-risk students. For this purpose, the Board of Education and the United Way created CAPS (Community Achievement Project in the Schools). Of the $12 million budgeted for CBOs through CAPS in 1991-92, $1 million was to be raised by the United Way itself.

At the end of May, 1990, shortly after Project Achieve was first announced, the Board of Education issued a special circular revising now the middle school dropout prevention program. As it had begun to do in the late 1980s, the Board allowed districts to include elementary schools in the program. At both the high school and the elementary/middle school levels, dropout prevention continued to receive the greatest part of its funding from the New York State initiated Attendance Improvement/Dropout Prevention program. Significantly, the elementary/middle school effort in New York City continued to be identified as the AIDP program, while the high school effort reached for a new identity as Project Achieve.

Both the 1990-91 and the 1991-92 circular mandated just three components of the AIDP program in elementary and middle schools: attendance outreach, counseling/case management

services, and parent involvement. *Health services, extended school day programs, school linkage programs, alternative instructional programs, and school restructuring initiatives were presented as optional components.* "Restructuring initiatives" covered a wide range of strategies, including multi-cultural environments, peer tutoring and multi-age classrooms, cooperative and small group activities, and grouping students with the same teacher or teachers for two or more years in a row. As was also the case for Project Achieve, the circulars gave a broadened range of risk criteria for identifying students who qualified for the AIDP program, and they mandated integration of students in temporary housing and pregnant and parenting students into existing or newly installed programs. Both a school-based model and a school-CBO collaborative model were described, giving districts and schools a free choice over whether or not to propose to engage CBOs. The management of the AIDP in the elementary and middle schools was to be carried out jointly by the central Office of Student Support Services, the successor to the Office of Student Progress, and the United Way. The 1990-91 circular announced essentially the same attendance and course pass performance objectives for students that had pertained to the DPI. The 1991-92 circular referred to improved academic achievement at various points, but concentrated solely on attendance in specifying goals of 40%, 45%, and 50% of targeted students improving over their prior year performance, for 1991-92, 1992-93, and 1993-94 respectively. Both circulars emphasized the importance of schools and districts reviewing data to gauge

and improve the effectiveness of their programs, while the 1991-92 circular stated that OREA would study student progress over a three-year period, and that "Evaluation findings and recommendations will be used to pinpoint effective program practices and fine tune the program for implementation in the future." (Office of the Chancellor, 1991, p. 16)

It is apparent from these summaries that the central offices' plans for the dropout prevention effort as such are much more ambitious in the high schools than in the elementary or middle schools. Even the attendance goals for the middle schools are modest, given the finding that there was better than 45% attendance improvement in the middle schools in each of the three years of the DPI. Up to a point, this might be attributed to the evaluation recommendations having been stronger for the high schools than the middle schools. However, the 1991-92 circular for the elementary and middle schools cites the "Teachers College Grannis Report" findings as the basis of a formidable list of program features that should be developed, beginning with "restructuring the school experience for at-risk students." The discrepancy lies between these "should be's" and the mandated program components or a clear process that encourages schools to develop the components listed as options, particularly alternative instructional programs and school restructuring initiatives. Program development in the elementary and middle schools thus becomes almost entirely dependent on the school-based planning teams that are required at both the elementary-middle and the high school levels. Or, and this is in fact the

crucial point, the development of an effective dropout prevention program in the elementary and middle schools is more dependent on the community school districts that are arrayed between the central Board and the schools. Whether a gain in local responsiveness, initiative, and ownership is greater than the loss of potential central support and mutual accountability is a key question that begs to be asked.

At the time of this writing, the Board of Education is developing a plan through which community school districts will be eligible for larger allocations of funded programs if they accept greater degrees of supervision and technical assistance from central. This strategy in the elementary and middle schools would parallel somewhat the funding at systemically different levels that has already been implemented in the high schools. For now, however, we have to look at the programs in terms of the regulations that currently apply.

How Project Achieve and the AIDP are developing in the schools

The writer is in no position to conduct an assessment like the DPI evaluation. He has had meetings with top officials of the Board of Education and the United Way, examined recent reports and printouts, interviewed members of a high school external visiting team, interviewed staff of a community school district AIDP office, and visited three high schools, one middle school, and an elementary school and an affiliated family shelter. Offsetting somewhat the brief duration of these observations, the writer has been extensively involved with a dropout prevention program in one other middle school. Since the

high schools selected for the visits were identified by central, and the middle and elementary schools by a district recommended at the Board, these schools have to be taken as examples of what the Board is striving for, rather than as representatives of how things are proceeding in all the schools. What can be reported is more the process that can be observed in the system today, and how student outcomes are being attended to at the Board, at United Way, and in some of the schools.

First of all, the general context of the school system must be recognized. Only a year after Joseph Fernandez had arrived and a restructured Board was proceeding apace, not only with the redesign of the dropout prevention programs as such but with the still more comprehensive initiatives of SBM/SDM (school based management/shared decision making), schoolwide Chapter 1 budgeting, and involvement of the community and corporate sector, potential deficits in both the city and the state revenues forced severe cutbacks in the school system budget. A combination of worsening economic factors for most families of the students in the public schools, a plague of guns on the streets, and racial-ethnic bias attacks that partly reflect these conditions, has created as great a sense of crisis in the city as can be remembered since the 1960s. These circumstances may obtain in all of the nation's large cities, but they are felt in New York City nonetheless.

Community based organizations. Partly as a counterbalance to these observations, we begin with the Community Achievement Project in the Schools. The United Way's management of the

contracts that the Board itself had made for 1990-91, for CBO involvement in elementary, intermediate or junior, and senior high schools, primed them to create a process that would improve the fit between school and student needs and CBO capabilities. The United Way engaged an agency especially to conduct a technical assistance program for smaller, grass roots, Latino CBOs, there having been low AIDP participation and funding for these organizations up to this time. This then fed into a larger effort to improve access for smaller, indigenous CBOs. Using a computerized data base on CBOs in New York City, the United Way, in February, 1991, sent applications to more than 1700 prospective CBOs, from which 230 indicated an interest in participating. Simultaneously, AIDP eligible schools were surveyed for the needs they had. Computerized matches were made of potential partners, and fairs were then held in each borough to acquaint schools with CBOs. By the end of the school year, the United Way had reviewed CBOs' applications and made recommendations for contracts to the Board of Education. The overall result for 1991-92 was that 60 new CBOs were engaged to provide services in the CAPS program for the first time, along with 49 previously involved CBOs, in 32 high schools, 62 elementary and middle schools, and 6 special education sites. An independent evaluation of the United Way's progress in carrying out CAPS during the first year, 1990-91, examined contracting and monitoring documents and interviewed CBO and school staff from random samples of agencies and sites. (Mirand Research Associates, 1991) Interestingly, two thirds of the CBO

respondents, but most of the school respondents, perceived that the United Way's involvement would improve the delivery of services to students at-risk of dropping out of school. Similar proportions perceived that CAPS would facilitate better integration of services provided by CBOs into the overall school experience of at-risk students. The lower proportions of CBO staff sharing these perceptions reflect at least partly their concern that the reporting requirements were too detailed and too focused on quantitative vs. qualitative issues, thus competing with time for serving students. CAPS now has a uniform set of records that all CBOs must complete, including for every student served an intake inventory of demographic and risk characteristics and a summary of recent attendance and course and test performance. Summaries of services to students are consistent with forms used by the Board, for example the Monthly Summary of Services Report, but call for considerably more detail. A United Way account supervisor may make announced or unannounced site visits to review records maintained by the CBO, including case/file folders for each student registered in the program, outreach logs, and daily activity reports. Significantly, the CBO quarterly reports to the United Way include questions pertaining to the host school's collaboration with the CBO and the integration of services into the overall plan.

A problem that was experienced in the fall of 1991-92 is that the actual cash flow to CBOs was delayed because the Board did not approve the budget until late in the summer. It was

delayed further for the many new CBOs because of time-consuming, state imposed requirements for clearances of CBO staff. In the intermediate school in which the writer happened to be working, this meant a very late startup for a neighborhood CBO that was engaged to work with parents, which in turn impacted on the school staff's own outreach. The process has been improved, but delays are anticipated again in 1992-93.

The United Way has created an extensive program for CBO staff development. A variety of workshops have been located in each of the boroughs. Participation has not been as high as desired, however, because of the difficulty staff have in extricating themselves from the demands of their sites, including conflicting mandated meetings. On-site staff development would be preferable, but is too expensive. To address this and other concerns, CAPS has created an Advisory Committee, with a range of stakeholder members including parents and students along with Board of Education, United Way, and other agency representatives, and a Problem Solving Committee composed of program administrators and staff from the United Way and the Board.

In July, 1991, the United Way took over the day to day operations of New York Working, a program that was developed by the New York City Partnership to increase students' graduation and employment prospects. In the nine Project Achieve high schools involved in New York Working this year, local CBOs coordinate employment initiatives like entrepreneurship and apprenticeship, and develop job placements for students. The United Way has also been building new alliances between the arts

community and the schools. Clearly, a structure is being created that shifts a significant part of the responsibility for developing and managing programs for at-risk students outside the Board of Education. Given the recent attention to the salary and expenses of the last president of the national organization, it is of note that the United Way of New York City supported New York State legislation that caps CBO administrative costs at 18% of contract for 1991-92, 15% for 1992-93, and 12% for 1993-94. The United Way gets 3.2% of the CAPS budget for its own administrative costs, and has to take even this from the funds it is committed to raise for CAPS.

High schools. What this observer senses at the Division of High Schools and in the three Project Achieve high schools he has visited is a thoroughgoing, data driven effort to establish dropout prevention as a central agenda of the target schools. Project Achieve funds are being used to leverage systemic changes within the schools as a whole.

The first school visited, a vocational school, had the least at-risk student body overall on the basis of attendance, but was eligible for the program because declining test scores had placed it on the state's Schools Under Registration Review list. A school that was 90% white just twelve years ago, 89% percent of the students are now minority, mostly African-American or Hispanic, while the faculty remain mostly white. Several years ago, the average rate of passing courses was below 55%, now the rate has attained 65% and the school's goal is to reach 75%. The most salient new feature of this school is its integration of

academic and support functions. This has been accomplished through the use of Project Achieve and the SBM/SDM process to reorganize the entire school into three houses of 300 to 350 students each, Service Occupations (auto mechanics, climate control, appliance repair), Building Trades (electrical, carpentry, housing) and Professional Careers (electronics, computers, drafting, business). Three guidance counselors have been moved from a sanctuary near the principal's office to commons for the three houses respectively, each a large room in which a counselor and a house coordinator both have their desks in the open, and where students can come just to relax, study, play games, and eat snacks available from vending machines that pay for student activities. These three full-time counselors (another counselor divides time among the houses) each specializes in certain areas for the school as a whole: peer mediation/conflict resolution, concurrent options (PM School, evening school, part-time employment, independent study), and college advisement respectively. Each house also has an "academic leader," a teacher who meets weekly with the heads of the academic departments (English, mathematics, science, social studies) to exchange information about students and their achievement. Formal case conferences are held infrequently, but the level of informal consultation on students is said to be very high. Collaborative efforts between shop and academic areas have resulted in a time schedule to facilitate networking and interdisciplinary curriculum. A long list of "decentralized house functions and responsibilities" includes outreach,

orientation, social events, tutoring, make-up work, newsletters, theme clubs, assemblies, awards/incentives, and parent involvement, among still others. A CBO has been engaged to operate a largely self-contained Basic Skills Academy for incoming students who have had high truancy rates, developing an individualized plan for each of about 25 students a semester so that they can satisfy course requirements to get academic credits. The CBO's nurturing classroom environment and extensive home visiting are intended to foster a positive school experience. The Academy students may participate in the school's shops and physical education classes, and are fully assigned to the houses when they are judged to have made a successful transition (back) into the school. The CBO participates in SBM, staff workshops, etc. Another CBO, a community college in the city university system, operates an on-site GED program in the school, which, along with the other concurrent options, greatly increases the flexibility of the school's offerings.

A second, much larger high school visited is a zoned school that this observer had previously visited during the DPI. Virtually all of the approximately 2000 students were and are members of minority racial/ethnic groups, with 75% today being first or second generation Carribean Americans. In 1987-88, an incipient house system did not include the DPI targeted students because they had their own program. Today, all ninth grade students are in one of five houses, and tenth grade students who were in the houses last year have been continued in them. Eventually, students at all grade levels will be in houses. One

house, a mini-school of four classes for ninth grade repeaters, occupies a space -- albeit in the basement -- that the students themselves have painted and made furniture for. Some of the houses are more clearly college oriented than others, but it is claimed that students in any house can aim for college, and that students can change houses if they want. Whereas previously, a few hundred students had been targeted for dropout prevention, now every student in the school is considered eligible for Project Achieve programs. At the same time, different specific populations of students have been assigned to different programs, especially those offered by CBOs. One local, Carribean CBO works with ninth grade students who have been truant or Long Term Absentees. These students start their day in school with a breakfast club that combines food and guidance. The CBO not only calls homes to locate students who have not come to school, it has a van that may go to the home to bring the student to school. Between 10 guidance counselors and 5 CBOs, the ratio of students to counselors in the school is about 130 to one. Guidance counselors assigned to each of the houses have regular meetings with teachers to identify student problems. A tutoring program is run by New York University for students with various needs ranging from basic skills remediation to preparation for regents' examinations. A peer tutoring program in which students are paid to tutor two students each after school is supervised by faculty. Concurrent options in this school include an on-site GED program and a Saturday School that enrolls high school students, adults, and 200 children ages 5 to 12. A nearby medical center operates

a health clinic in the school, staffed by a regular nurse full time and a medical doctor twice a week. The center is equipped and staffed to provide dental services to students in the school. A variety of organizations are involved in community outreach, to strengthen relationships with families and the image of the school in the community. Again, a variety of corporations are involved with the school, particularly to sponsor part-time job programs which are now available to about a quarter of the students and which are coordinated in the school through New York Working. The school's overall attendance climbed from about 79% in 1987-88 to 84% in 1990-91. However, data on courses passed and credits gained were not spontaneously reviewed during the observation, and may not have been playing as crucial a role in planning as was observed in the other two high schools.

The third high school is again a zoned school of about 2000 students that the writer had visited during the DPI. Here, both then and now, almost all of the students are African American or Hispanic. Here, as in the first, vocational school, the entire school is organized into houses. Unlike the first and second schools, however, the houses here have been detracked. A College Bound House is being phased out, while houses called Science-Tech, Humanities, Business, International (bilingual), and Sigma (Special Education) all include students with college aspirations. The issue of abandoning the earlier tracks was hotly contested in the SBM/SDM core committee that is involved in all school-level decisions. The fact that there is an 80% overlap between the SBM/SDM and Project Achieve committees both

contributed to this decision and strengthens Achieve in the school. Project Achieve's most salient success in the school right now is a Discovery Mini-school for all ninth grade students not in International House or Sigma. Discovery is itself divided into three clusters, Red, White, and Blue. Each cluster has a coordinator, a counselor, a family assistant, and a CBO social worker. The colors readily identify offices and staff for students. One of the social workers uses an elaborate incentives system based on points students get from their teachers for attendance and successful school work. This requires a lot of cooperation from the teachers. Another cluster's social worker tracks down students relentlessly to "get on their case," while the third runs a community leadership training program for students. An Academic Olympics recently involved the students in intense competition, and the closeness of the final totals for the three clusters demonstrated that they were fairly evenly matched. Attendance increased and the number of LTAs decreased for ninth grade students in the first 5 months of 1991-92 compared to the same period in 1990-91. These results were almost reversed for tenth graders in the school, however, and only slight attendance gains were found for the school as a whole. The percent of courses passed increased only for Discovery ninth grade students. On promotion to tenth grade, the Discovery students will be merged into the upper-level houses and a new cohort of ninth graders will enter the mini-school. A Project Achieve Committee meeting attended by the writer identified as a principal problem to be focused on in the

upcoming SBM/SDM retreat the fact that the Discovery students might feel abandoned on leaving the mini-school, and the necessity of strengthening the tenth grade experience. This will require closer coordination between the traditionally organized subject matter departments and the houses. Significantly, a calendar of accomplishments for the current year was slowed down only slightly by the retirement of five assistant principals (as part of a system-wide action), and three of these positions were exchanged for counselors.

There have been many other developments in the school. New York University maintains a very comfortable and effective tutoring center at the school, as it does also at the second high school visited. An interdisciplinary arts program is affiliated with Lincoln Center. Sports programs are expanding. A health clinic with a nurse, doctor, social worker, and business officer on duty every day is operated in the high school by a nearby hospital. It sees an average of 25 students a day, performing comprehensive physicals, treating asthma attacks, and diagnosing and referring students for assistance with pregnancies, obesity, parasites, etc. Medicaid is used where possible, but services are free to students who are not covered. The clinic plans to extend services to students' families. The school has a LYFE program and a class in which parenting students study children's literature. A New York Working Jobs Center combines the resources of several projects. The largest of the part-time jobs programs under the DPI was located at this school, and it has been continued as a "Jobs Corps." Reduced tax-levy funds have

forced a different strategy of combining shorter-term jobs with a placement service for jobs in the local economy. Another program, Co-op Education, is housed in the same center, but has suffered a severe loss of jobs funded by the private sector. On the other hand, a special jobs program for bilingual students, who had been found to be greatly underrepresented in the former program, has now been created with tax-levy funds. A summer jobs program is also administered in the center. Except for the Co-op Program, which involves students taking courses and working in alternate weeks, part-time jobs students do not have a special program of academic supports. Their attendance and grades are closely monitored, students who need it may be referred to tutoring, but a "winnowing out" process results in the jobs going to academically more successful students.

There are both heartening and sobering dimensions to these cases. In all three schools, the principals work collaboratively with their staffs and CBOs in a combination top-down, bottom-up style that promotes both initiative and accountability. A multiplicity of programs and functions appear to be well coordinated, and the schools are striving to incorporate still more. In two of the schools at least, all kinds of bulletins, newsletters, and posters publicize student outcomes by month, marking period, or year, and by grade level. This has clearly been fostered by the Division of High Schools, most particularly by the director of the division's Office of Performance, Outcomes, Program and Professional Development. The visits of the external teams have been described from both sides as

resembling doctoral exams, with the teams this year using a battery of questions prepared by Project Achieve. This may have had a downside as well, however. In at least one borough, the "externality" of the visiting teams meant that it was doubly hard for them to come to grips with a school's real problems, and staff of the schools seemed to want opportunities to consult more with colleagues in other schools who could show how they had implemented houses or whatever it was that concerned them. By contrast, in an unrehearsed meeting attended by the writer in the third high school, the internal Project Achieve committee of some 25 members reviewed data on recent attendance, courses passed, and credits accumulated, calculated by grade level for the school, schools in the Borough, and all Project Achieve schools in the city. These results had been prepared by OREA and distributed to all of the Project Achieve coordinators in a meeting at the Division of High Schools the week before. As reported above, this followup meeting of school staff was very problem focused.

The first thing that is sobering is the results themselves. The cup is half full or half empty, depending on whether one counts the number of instances where there has been a positive change and progress toward a goal, or one looks at the gap that still remains between achievement and long-range goals. For ninth and tenth grade students overall in the 32 Project Achieve high schools, attendance increased by 0.8% while LTAs decreased by 1.23%, in 1990-91 compared with 1989-90. Students at or above the 50th percentile on a reading test increased by 7.6% in grade

9 and 11.0% in grade 10. At an individual school level, the proportion of courses passed by Discovery students in the third school visited was 56% in Fall 1991-92, which compares with 45% for the equivalent set of students the year before. The average number of credits gained by ninth grade students in the school was 2.9, compared with 2.5 the year before. On the other hand, the average for ninth graders in the Project Achieve schools overall was 2.8 in Fall 1991-92 but had been 3.0 in Fall 1990-91. Considering that students are taking six or more credits, these results parallel the low rates of passing courses. The rates go up grade by grade, but this reflects the fact that there are fewer survivors at each successive level. In the 32 Project Achieve high schools in Fall 1991, 35% of all students were ninth graders, 26% were tenth graders, 20% were in the eleventh grade, 11% were in the twelfth grade, and 7% were in Special Education.

It is argued that Project Achieve's success in bringing back LTAs who still attend at lower rates especially contributes to lower course achievement. This same observation was made for the DPI when total school attendance was not improving, and it does not diminish the necessity of there being more radical accomodations to students within classrooms if students are to have a chance of graduating in even five or six years. Several initiatives, for example one in global education and another in the arts, have special funding for selected schools. Each of the borough superintendents organizes a substantial professional development program. Workshops on cooperative learning in mathematics were cited in all three high schools visited as an

example of current staff development. However, per session pay for teachers to attend workshops was one of the items that got seriously reduced in the 11% cut suffered by school budgets for 1991-92. Perhaps an even more decisive factor is that professional development activities outside of designated school hours are only mandated for untenured administrators and teachers.

Unfortunately, funds are being shifted into security budgets at this very time. Two of the three schools visited by this writer are now participating in a very expensive weapons scanning program. On the day of visiting one of the high schools, the writer was scanned himself from shoulder to toe, and had a small sense of what students were experiencing on their entrance to the school, where some forty security officers were scanning students in the auditorium. One well placed observer has suggested that there is an increasing polarization between the classroom and the street, as force is brought in to counter force, and as more teachers say they cannot deal with it. This is probably a factor in the high absence rates of teachers in many of the schools. Still, these were not the voices that this observer heard in the three high schools visited, from teachers and administrators who manifestly cared and held high expectations for their students.

Final data on dropouts in 1990-91 are not yet available. Preliminary data distributed by the Division of High Schools to Project Achieve administrators indicated that 15 of the Achieve high schools had improved or were likely to improve over the rate for 1989-90, while 17 represented "concerns" or "priority". The

first and third high schools visited fell in the "improved" category, while the second was listed as a concern. In the long run, the use that the Division and the schools are making of data of this kind augurs as strongly for improvement as any other feature of the effort that we have described.

Elementary and middle schools. It is acknowledged at the Board of Education that there is great variation in how effectively the AIDP program is carried out in the elementary and middle schools through the different community school districts. Of course, there is also substantial variation among the high schools. However, the Board not only has less political control over the districts than over the borough superintendencies, it also has less information. Daily attendance in the elementary and middle schools is just now being computerized citywide through the New York State supported Automate The Schools (ATS) system. ATS also stores students' achievement test data, but, unlike the United Applications Processing Center (UAPC) system used for the high schools, ATS does not contain students' course grades. Furthermore, because ATS runs only a fixed set of programs, its data cannot be accessed as flexibly at the Board as the information in the UAPC system. (This is not the whole picture, however. ATS can be accessed directly from the schools themselves more easily than UAPC can.) The upshot of this is that, even though data are collected in the schools on targeted students' course performance as well as attendance, results are fed back to districts and in turn to the schools only many months after they might enter into "real time" decision making.

To see the AIDP program at its best, the writer was referred to the AIDP coordinator in the same district in which he himself has been working in a middle school. The ensuing visits were nonetheless, or all the more, an eye opener on what a program can mean in the hands of administrators and teachers who know how to use it.

The AIDP program in this district has been renamed the AIMS program, for Attendance Improvement Means Success. This responds to a feeling that many DPI staff in the schools had expressed, that the program should have a more positive emphasis than "dropout prevention." At the same time, the initial discussion in the district office focused very heavily on the extraordinary needs of the community's children. A heavy influx of new Americans has crowded the district's 37 elementary and middle schools (in 50 buildings!) to bursting. At 130% of capacity, many of the district's elementary as well as middle schools have enrollments of well over a thousand. Congruently with this, the children are impacted by multiple factors individually. Hunger, illness, abuse, drugs, separation and divorce, homelessness, abandonment, guns, incarceration of a relative, death are all very common traumas for these children. It is a miracle that the children are able to function in the school at all. For families that are poor and alienated from public institutions, it takes years to build trust between the family and the school. There are reasons why often no one is home or answers the door when a family worker tries to make a home visit.

A very strong sentiment remains with staff who were involved

in the DPI that the Teachers College evaluation failed to grasp the needs of the city's children. As the principal author of the evaluation reports, the writer recognizes that in the effort to call attention to the systemic nature of the problem in the schools, the characterization of the DPI as "add-ons" devalued the work of those who were giving support to the children. This has become more apparent as the writer has observed in his own project how essential added staff are to students whose teachers may be overwhelmed by the enormity of the situation. The need for support services has to be fully acknowledged, at the same time that attention is turned to strengthening the environment of the school as a whole.

The district office conducts frequent staff development workshops for AIMS staff, on topics that this year have included homelessness, rape and sexual assault, children of divorce or separation, women and domestic violence, family law (*e.g.*, tenants' rights), entitlements, immigrants' rights, housing, and death trauma. AIMS facilitators interviewed by the writer in several schools all testified to the value of these workshops.

The AIMS (AIDP) program operates in ten of the district's 37 schools. The writer was taken to a middle school that enrolls 636 children in fifth grade, sixth grade, and special education classes. The school is divided into five houses, named Mango Street, Strivers Row, and the like. Four of the houses have both fifth and sixth grades. A student entering in the fifth grade remains in his or her same homeroom (usually called "official class" in the New York system, but not in this school) through

the sixth grade. Furthermore, while the teachers specialize in different subject areas, they come to the homerooms to instruct, rather than the classes traveling to the teachers. This includes the PCEN remedial instruction, which is conducted for eligible students right in their classrooms rather than on the usual pullout basis. During the mornings, double periods are scheduled to allow more integration of subjects. The classrooms and corridors visited were gorgeously decorated with paintings, writing, and constructions that were clearly made by the students in all kinds of hands-on as well as more academic projects.

Although this is nominally a middle school, which would fund it to target 150 students, the school has been funded by the elementary school formula that allows only 75 students. But 90 students are enrolled in AIMS. This reflects partly the fact that, even after the full quota of students has been identified at the beginning of the year, late registering students whose families live in temporary shelters or have recently relocated have to be included in the AIMS program. (This requirement applies to AIDP programs throughout the schools). The AIMS students are not grouped together at any time of the day except those who attend extended day activities. The coordinator, who in this school functions as both facilitator and guidance counselor, has placed a premium on communicating directly with the teachers, knowing the students in their classroom situations, and mediating between teachers and families. The school has a parents room and has had a variety of parent involvement activities since the beginning of the year.

Since the current principal's arrival here five years ago, attendance and test scores have risen dramatically in the school. The principal had to start with a demoralized staff, but in time some left, others joined, and the faculty as a whole cohered. AIMS appears to be thoroughly integrated into the life of this school.

A K-4 elementary school with over a thousand students was included in order to visit both the school and a nearby shelter for 49 homeless families. Unlike some city shelters which are like barracks, this one is an attractive, recently rennovated apartment building with very well maintained, highly secure common facilities as well as a private apartment for each family. But as is true generally for the 4600 families in temporary housing in the city, many of the families here have already moved three or more times. The typical family is a mother with four children. The program assists with many facets of their daily living and helps them seek acceptable permanent housing. Every child in the shelter has a birthday party; often this is the only celebration that the family can afford, either materially or emotionally. A guidance counselor is employed full time to work with the families and the school. Every morning she accompanies the children from the shelter on a bus that makes the round of the several schools in which the children are enrolled. Staff here are very proud that the shelter children had an average attendance of 94% in their schools through February. There is an AIMS corner in the shelter office, as there is a SAFE corner in the AIMS room at the school. Both in the shelter and at the

school, a prominent cabinet includes dictionaries, educational games, school supplies, and other incentives given to the children for attendance and successful school performance. The AIMS room in this school was the most attractive space observed in a grim, very old building that had virtually no children's work in the halls that could be observed. As also holds in both of the middle schools where the writer has worked or observed, every AIMS child's attendance and a record of attendance outreach is posted daily on bold wall charts. The principal told how the school had "tried everything" to try to improve attendance, but in recent years could not bring it up beyond 86%. This first year that the AIMS program has been in this school, attendance is over 90% in ten classrooms, and is 88% for the school overall. Recognizing the ability of the teacher who has been appointed as the AIMS facilitator, the principal would like to have her designated as the SBM/SDM coordinator for the school as a whole. However, the district is not yet willing to support this larger responsibility for the facilitator.

Discussion at the district office that was both candid and discrete recognized that many factors were involved in the success of an AIMS program in a given school. New principals and new facilitators made it easier to get a fresh start, (as was also the case with the high schools visited). The Pupil Personnel Team works better in small schools than in large, because the teachers are more likely to know the students. Many teachers are resistant to change, especially those with licensure in subjects rather than common branches. In time SBM/SDM might

bring change, but this too depends on leadership in a school.

While district staff asserted repeatedly that change is slow, they are hardly complacent about this. The district effort is energetic and purposeful. In addition to the beginning-of-the year and end-of-the year recording of students' courses passed or failed that is required from all AIMS programs by the central Board of Education, the district has facilitators summarize these and other achievement and attendance data at midyear for every targeted student. The results are analyzed by the district and discussed with facilitators at a district meeting. Partly in response to the fact that the district has little control over high schools' outreach to their students, linkage has refocused on the transition between elementary school and middle school. (The Division of High Schools does have a fledgling Project Welcome for linkage with the middle schools, but only a few of the many middle schools feeding students to a given high school can be involved.) Of the various areas of need discussed, the one in which the greatest shortcoming is perceived is health. It is not just a question of coordination with the Board of Health, they are strapped for resources too.

The district has obtained technical assistance from central's Office of Student Support Services every time they have requested it. However, the fact that the number of OSSS staff for the program has been greatly reduced since the DPI years has to enter into how much support the districts generally receive. The Director of OSSS personally scans the monthly tallies of services submitted through the districts, and calls districts to

request an explanation when, say, home visits or counseling sessions in one school or another fall below the level that ought to be maintained. OREA's evaluation of the 1990-91 AIDP program is at this writing [though surely not by the end of the month?] still being edited, which means that feedback on results will be available in the districts and the schools only a full year after the year in question.

During 1990-91 and 1991-92, the writer has directed a Stay in School Partnership Program (SSPP) in an intermediate (6-7-8) school in the same district for which visits to two other schools have been described. The neighborhood of the school is as severely impacted as any in the district, and student achievement has been as low as in almost any middle school in the city. Funding for the SSPP was reduced by two-thirds statewide for 1991-92 from the 1990-91 level, and now has been eliminated from the New York State budget altogether for 1992-93. The SSPP generally has concentrated on tutoring and mentoring for students, in both elementary and secondary schools. However, the thrust of the Teachers College proposal emphasized a more systemic collaboration with school staff to strengthen the core program of the school. Working with two out of the eight clusters of students in this school of more than 1400 students, the SSPP made substantial progress in developing career education activities in one and a life environments enrichment program in another. The program also pulled together various support staff of the school to form a Social Services Network for the two clusters. Even in the face of the sharp budget cutback for 1991-

92, however, a School-Community Liaison position was added this year, to employ a skilled parent to foster links between the teachers and the families. It was apparent that even the several teachers who themselves had the strongest outreach to families still could use this assistance, while other teachers simply did not have the motivation or the ability to communicate with families. The career education effort was abandoned when the SSPP could no longer provide a facilitator, and the life environments activities had to be provisioned from scratch after a summer break-in vandalized the school and destroyed a greenhouse that teachers had created in one of the classrooms. The extreme difficulty of over-burdened teachers[6] developing curriculum on-the-run, even with outside assistance, has pointed to the necessity of a summer curriculum workshop which the project hopes to get funded. Just as fundamental a limitation, however, has been the very low press for achievement in this school. With the administration using the location of the school to explain its poor results (it is indeed true that the district has assigned low achieving children disproportionately to this school), and staff simply not being accountable for student outcomes, teachers have had very little pressure from within to change their classroom practices. A teacher can, and sometimes does, fail half or more of the students in his or her class, and not have to look for any explanation other than the test scores and behavior of the students themselves. The school has a schoolwide SBM/SDM committee, but SBM/SDM has so far concentrated mainly on school climate and discipline. Recently, however, a

state initiated School Under Registration Review investigation has concluded that major priority now has to be given to "instruction and the effective delivery of curriculum." This is entirely consistent with the SSPP approach, which the report cites as a positive factor in the school. Still, much stronger leadership will be required before the school can use its resources to improve student outcomes.[7]

One of the eight clusters in this school -- not one that the SSPP has worked with -- is made up of students targeted for the district AIMS program. The program facilitator is dedicated to students and effective with parents. However, the SURR report observes that "The AI/DP program, which should give potential dropouts a particularly rich and attractive school program, was found to be unappealing and underdeveloped compared to the other programs [in the school]." (SED, March 16, 1992, p. 9) This is not news to the district's AIMS coordinator, but, at least until the state ~~this~~ report was filed, there has been little that she could do about it.

Prospects for future improvement

The kinds of progress observed in all three of the high schools and the elementary and middle school that were visited is one solid basis for believing that the system's response to at-risk students is being improved. The United Way's orchestration of community based organizations appears to be bringing a rich array of new resources to the schools. Project Achieve is working very deliberately to foster the integration of academic and personal-social supports for students. The strategy combines

resources for comprehensive programs with accountability for results. At all levels of the schools, the Chancellor's team is attempting to break down barriers between different units and groups, through school based management, schoolwide Chapter 1 programs, and still other major initiatives. However, the relationship between the community school districts and the Board of Education, and indeed between the districts and the communities themselves, desperately needs to be remade. Parents need to become still more centrally involved in school governance than they are now through the few positions they hold in SBM/SDM and through their participation in the selection of new school principals. The schools need more principals who have high expectations for students, are data oriented and able to manage a complex organization, and who are culturally aware. SBM/SDM teams need to evolve through their fairly predictable preoccupation with climate and discipline toward a greater focus on curriculum and instruction.

A still unresolved issue is what balance there should be between a systemic approach to school reform and the targeting of individual students at risk. The evaluation made clear that targeting alone did not substantially improve outcomes for students, as long as the larger school environment was not also dealt with. But the opposite may equally apply. It is possible that, as was true before, programs that demonstrably benefit some students still do not impact the students most in need. If this seems less likely to be the case now, it is partly because the examination of results for specific groups of students has become

a more central part of the dropout prevention process overall.

Virtually all of the problems that were identified in the DPI evaluation, and that are recounted in the first half of this report, could be problems still in individual schools. At the same time, the New York City Board of Education's serious effort to learn from its experience and to anticipate these problems in the schools today is unparalleled in the system's recent history. Of course, changes in education have to be accompanied by, indeed are interdependent with, improvements in health, housing, and employment. Developments of this kind that are to be found in many of the schools themselves need to be multiplied many times over. Still, the schools have to act as if the future were now. We cannot wait until a new generation has enjoyed the benefits of reform from earliest childhood, but have to get the schools ready for this generation at every step of the way. The New York City school system is very much engaged in this process.

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Notes

1. For the origins of the community school board system, see Ravitch, 1974.

2. All of these reports are accessible through ERIC. The evaluation was carried out by the Institute for Urban and Minority Education at Teachers College. In addition to this writer, the authors of the reports included Carolyn Riehl, Thomas Bailey, Selina Bendock, Luisa Contreras, Robert Crain, Kiveli Filmeridis, Robert Futterman, Carol Gayle, Joseph Gerics, Judith Goldwater, Kenneth Jewell, Bruce A. Jones, Young-sil Kang, Nava Lerer, Yvonne Martinez, Aaron Pallas, Sanna Randolph, Michele Reich, David Rindskopf, Carolyn Springer, Diana Stewart, Susan Sullivan, Maria Torres-Guzman, Miriam Westheimer, and Denise Willis. I am deeply indebted to all of these individuals for their contributions.

3. A variety of studies suggest that individuals conform more to gender stereotypes when they are under stress, or as a way of coping with stress. See, for example, Freedman, 1975; Grannis, 1992. The evaluation linked this phenomenon to the repeated finding that, in both the middle schools and the high schools, males got substantially lower grades than females despite the fact that male students' attendance was not significantly different from female students' attendance, and even though these samples of males and females did not have significantly different reading or mathematics achievement test scores.

4. The development of houses for ninth graders began in 1986-87. Project Achieve is one of the programs through which houses are being expanded today. For a well informed study of the house system in New York City high schools, see Oxley, 1990.

5. In the middle schools, the degree of proficiency in English made a difference in every area of service recorded -- letters, telephone calls, home visits, individual and group guidance sessions, and so on. The analysis revealed that students who were proficient in English systematically received more services

than those whose English proficiency was marginal or limited. This pattern held both for the DPI students who were clustered for academic remediation or enrichment and for those who were just scattered in regular classes.

6. Teachers are over burdened for a variety of reasons. Outside of school, these include families, second jobs, and studying for graduate degrees or licensing examinations. In school, an emphasis on conformity and order for students actually produces disorder, and many teachers' "prep time" is used covering classes, for pay, for the teachers who are absent on a given day. Teachers who are very invested in their students still have to contend with these competing factors.

7. A fuller account of this project is discussed in "Starting up a University/School Partnership in a High Risk School," a chapter that the author has contributed to a forthcoming book about the New York State Stay in School Partnership Program.

CALCULATION OF THE DROPOUT RATE IN NEW YORK CITY: A TECHNICAL NOTE

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In a recent monograph deposited with the ERIC system -- "Educational Reforms for At-Risk Students: New York City Case Study" (Grannis, 1992) -- I used an invalid method to calculate a projected four-year dropout rate for students in the New York City high schools. The method used simply multiplied by four the rate that had been reported by the New York City Board of Education for a given single year. For example, the finding that 7.85% of all high school students in 1985-86 had dropped out during that year yielded by this method of calculation a four-year projected dropout rate of 31.4%.

The method used by the Board of Education itself, however, first subtracts the dropout rate for one year from 100% to obtain a one year survival rate, and then multiplies this rate by itself three times to get a projected survival rate after four years. The resultant survival rate is then subtracted from 100% to get a projected four-year dropout rate. The 1985-86 dropout rate of 7.85% yields a four-year dropout rate of 27.89% in the following way:

Percent of students who dropped out in 1985-86 = 7.85%

Percent of students who survived = 100.0 - 7.85 = 92.15%

Four-year survival rate = .9215 X .9215 X .9215 X .9215 = .7211

Four-year projected dropout rate = 100 - 72.11 = 27.89%

Table 1 shows the dropout rates reported between 1982-83 and 1991-92 for all New York City Day High Schools, and the four-year rates projected by the survival method, to the nearest tenth of a percent. This table corrects the results reported in Table 5 of the New York City Case Study referred to above.

The cross-sectional, four-year survival method of calculation is used by the Board of Education in compliance with a New York State requirement, to obtain results that can be compared with other school districts in New York State. However, the Board of Education has adopted a cohort tracking system beginning with the class of 1986, and now reports results yielded by both methods. The dropout rate calculated by the cohort method for the class of 1986 was 21.8% at the end of four years (1986) and reached 28.3% at the end of the seventh and final year

studied (1989). The cohort rate at the end of four years was lower, but the final, seventh year rate was slightly higher than the rate obtained by the cross-sectional projection method detailed above.

Table 2 shows the results of the cohort studies for the Classes of 1986 through 1992. It can be seen more generally that the cohort dropout rates at the end of the fourth year of high school are substantially lower than the rates obtained by the cross-sectional projection method, while the projection method rates are much closer to the final, seventh year cohort rates.

How the Board of Education defines dropouts, graduates, students discharged for other reasons, and students still enrolled in school is explained in the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Report from which Table 2 has been copied (OREA, 1993). The reader will note that, while the proportion of students still enrolled in school after four years has increased for recent cohorts, the percent of students graduating in four years has not increased. This observation has been the focus of much recent discussion in the city. See, for example, the New York City Case Study which the present note refers to (Grannis, 1992).

Table 1

Dropout Rates for All New York City Day High Schools
1982-83 to 1991-92

Year	Percent of Students in Given Year	Projected Rate over Four Years
1982-83	11.4	38.4%
1983-84	11.4	38.4%
1984-85	9.4	32.5%
1985-86	7.9	27.9%
1986-87	7.3	26.2%
1987-88	7.5	26.8%
1988-89	8.1	28.7%
1989-90	6.6	24.0%
1990-91	5.5	20.1%
1991-92	4.8	17.7%

Sources: OREA (1991, 1992, 1993).

Table 2

(Table 21 from OREA 1993, p. 41; reproduced with permission of Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment, NYCBOE.)

Cohort Study Results for the Classes of 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1992

	Years of High School				
Class/Status	4	5	6	7	*Final*
Class of 1986 (N = 71,484)					
Dropouts	21.8%	26.4%	27.3%	26.2%	28.3%
Graduates	41.0	45.6	54.1	57.3	57.3
Discharged	12.3	12.7	13.1	14.4	14.4
Still Enrolled*	24.9	15.3	5.5	2.1	—
Class of 1987 (N = 81,847)					
Dropouts	22.4%	28.4%	27.7%	27.0%	29.4%
Graduates	39.2	46.6	55.5	56.9	56.9
Discharged	11.6	12.4	13.5	13.7	13.7
Still Enrolled*	26.8	12.5	3.3	2.4	—
Class of 1988 (N = 82,935)					
Dropouts	20.8%	25.1%	24.8%	24.4%	27.5%
Graduates	40.1	52.5	56.5	57.3	57.3
Discharged	13.8	14.8	15.0	15.2	15.2
Still Enrolled*	25.3	7.5	3.7	3.1	—
Class of 1989 (N = 85,375)					
Dropouts	20.9%	25.1%	24.8%	23.9%	27.7%
Graduates	38.0	51.5	53.1	55.5	55.4
Discharged	15.7	16.3	16.4	16.9	16.9
Still Enrolled*	25.4	7.1	5.7	3.8	—
Class of 1990 (N = 78,936)					
Dropouts	19.2%	22.6%	23.2%		
Graduates	37.6	49.5	53.5		
Discharged	15.3	15.9	16.4		
Still Enrolled*	27.8	12.0	6.9		
Class of 1991 (N = 70,510)					
Dropouts	17.2%	20.8%			
Graduates	38.9	50.2			
Discharged	16.0	16.6			
Still Enrolled*	27.8	12.4			
Class of 1992 (N = 71,028)					
Dropouts	16.2%				
Graduates	38.7**				
Discharged	15.3				
Still Enrolled*	29.8				

* Includes students with unknown status.

** If August, 1992 graduates are included, the Class of 1992 graduation rate would be 42.9 percent and the still-enrolled rate would be 25.6 percent.

Note: All results are as of June, 1992, except for the Classes of 1986, 1987, and 1988, which are as of June, 1989, June, 1990, and June, 1991, respectively.

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